

Bill C4 & The Church's Response to Canada's Recent Ban on Conversion Therapy  
John 3:1-21  
Pastor Jeremy Cagle, January 16, 2022

Good morning, everyone. Before we get started in our sermon this morning, I just want to mention, as you're probably well aware, we're doing something a little different today. This is something we don't normally do as a church. But we're going to talk about the subject of politics. We're going to talk about a new law that's been recently passed here in Canada. It seems like we're getting a lot of those recently, new laws are coming at us every day, but we don't normally talk about them at length from the pulpit. That's not a usual thing for us. We don't quote them verbatim, and so forth. We don't believe we're a theocracy here as a church, we don't think it's our job to take over the government and put ourselves in their place and bring the kingdom of God down to earth that way. But we do think it's our job to shepherd you through times like this. We do believe it's our duty as a church and as elders, to care for your souls. And in order to do that, we want to address something that our government has done in recent weeks.

On December 7 of last year, the Canadian federal Senate voted unanimously to pass a law that was recently passed in the House of Commons, to criminalize something that's known as conversion therapy. Now, that term may not be familiar to you, because we do talk about conversion as a church. That's a word you'll hear a lot, but we don't often talk about therapy. So to clarify what they mean by that, the government defines conversion therapy in the bill as any practice, treatment, or service designed to change a person's sexual orientation to heterosexual or change a person's gender expression so that it confirms to the sex assigned to him at birth. They also defined it as any practice designed to repress non heterosexual attraction. So obviously, this is a document created with the LGBTQ community in mind. But it says you can do anything that might try to change a person's mind on the issue of sex. He can't say anything that might try to alter their behavior on that from homosexual to heterosexual. Now, to be clear, you can guide it the other way around, if you want. You can go from heterosexual to homosexual, and the bill does not address that. But you can't go the other way. Because if you do that you could get arrested and face up to five years in prison. The penalties are very high.

Now the trouble with this law is that it's ambiguous. I've been talking to several people this past month or so and reading up on it. And no one really knows exactly what it means because it might just relate to the counseling room, or those who tried to talk to gay people one-on-one when they come in for help. And you tell them, you can't live this way you need to repent of this behavior, because it doesn't please the Lord. Or it might refer to the workplace where someone says you have to change all this in order to keep your job; they say we're going to let you go because it violates the terms of your employment. Or it might relate to the pulpit. This law might pertain to those who speak out about it in church like we're doing right here. But the problem is that no one really knows; it's very open ended. It's a confusing law. But I'll tell you how it does affect us as a church. This is exactly what we do here at Grace: we tell people that God made them male and female. We say that He created the genders, which means it wasn't our idea. It was His. It wasn't something that somebody made up one day in church. It was something that He made up on the sixth day of creation. And as a result, it's permanent. Despite what some may tell you, this is not something that can be changed because you can't perform a surgery or take some drugs in order to alter it now, and turn a man into a woman or a woman into a man. It just doesn't work that way. God made sure of it. Which also means that if you try to do that this is what will happen to you: you will be miserable. There'll be consequences that you'll regret the rest of your life. But all this is to say, this is something that we're very transparent about here. We always have been, because we believe the Bible tells us what to think about this

issue, not the culture, not the courts, not the government. Scripture alone speaks on this issue for us, which has never been a problem before now. We've never had an issue with it to this extent with the creating of this new law. So we feel like we need to address it with you as a church. And in order to do that. I want to ask you to open your Bibles up to the Gospel of John.

As you are turning there since this new bill is, I want to let you know that I've had a lot of time to think about this bill and look into it. And as I've done that, one thing that really struck me as I read it is the term "conversion" because that's a word that we use as a church. And it's a term that's part of our vocabulary. We believe someone can change by the power of God and not just from homosexual to heterosexual or transgender to cisgender. We believe they can change from death to life. We believe a sinner can go to a saint, if he puts his faith in Christ; everything can turn upside down for him. And so to address this issue, I want us to look in John chapter three. If you would read this with me. The Word of God says this,

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; this man came to Jesus by night and he said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher, for no one can do the signs that You do unless God is with him." Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he's old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'you must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it's going, so is everyone who was born in the Spirit.

Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and you don't understand these things? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and testify of what we have seen, and you do not accept our testimony. If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that whoever believes in Him will have eternal life.

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

We're going to stop the reading of God's word there. But as you read that, you can tell that Jesus is talking about the doctrine of conversion here, because he tells Nicodemus that he must be born again. And that's what this term is referring to. Born again is another way of saying converted, changed, transformed, renewed, all those things. And just to say a little bit about what you just read, the Gospel of John has been called the simple gospel, because this message is very simple. At the end of the book, John tells you that these things have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of a living God. In other words, this is why John wrote, this was the point of the book. He wants you to believe in Jesus. And in order to do that, it gives you seven stories of people who met Jesus face to face and some believed and some didn't. Some were converted, some were not. But he tells you about the woman at the well and the woman caught in adultery and the lame man who was healed in chapter

five. He tells you about the noblemen and Lazarus and the blind man, how he was cured of his blindness. And he also tells you about this guy here in chapter three.

It says, "Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews." When John says this man was a Pharisee, it doesn't mean a lot to us today. But the Pharisees were one of the most powerful religious groups in Israel at the time. They held tremendous sway. The historian Josephus tells us there were about 4000 of them in the first century, which is not a lot, but they controlled all the activities in the synagogue. So they had a lot of influence. You could look at them as the heads of some major denomination of our day. And this man belonged to that. He was a member of that sect. It also says his name was Nicodemus, which is significant because of all the people that John talks about in his Gospel, this is one of the only ones that he names of all those seven people I just mentioned that Jesus encounters. This is one of the few that's not anonymous. And the reason is because his name met Victor of the people in Greek. How would you like that name? Champion. We call our dogs champion as a sarcastic statement. Well, this guy actually had that name. Maybe it was due to his success and might have been a nickname because he wasn't just a Pharisee. He was a Pharisee of Pharisees. He wasn't just a leader. He was a leader of leaders, cream of the crop, top of the food chain. The verse also says He was a ruler of the Jews. And that term was probably a reference to the Sanhedrin, which was the group of 70 people who governed all the affairs in Israel. They called all the shots. But John says all this to show you that this is quite a guy in chapter three. He's a very impressive person. Later on, in chapter four, Jesus is going to talk to the woman at the well. And she was the opposite of that. She was the least impressive person in the first century because she was a woman and she was a Samaritan and she was an adulterous. This guy is totally different.

And if you think about it, if a man like this came to you at night, in order to talk to you about religion, what would you say? If he approached you, in order to pick your brain on the topic of God and see what you thought, what would you tell him? If you're honest, most of us would probably pat him on the back and say, "Way to go, you're doing a good job, man." We'd probably take him out to lunch or buy him coffee, get him a doughnut and say, "Don't change a thing, Just keep doing what you're doing." But I want you to see what Jesus tells him. It's very different. If you look in verse three, this is what Jesus says to a guy like this: "Jesus answered and said to him, 'Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born again, [unless you are born again], [you] cannot see the kingdom of God.'" Now I will explain that to you in a moment, we'll walk through this passage, but a key word here is the term "born again". It's the Greek word *gennao* and *anothen*. It means born again, or born a second time, the word *gennao* is actually a spin-off of the word Genesis. So this could be translated "Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is created again, he cannot see the kingdom of heaven." So not only do you need to do it once, Jesus says, but you need to do it again. Not only do you need to be created one time as a baby in your mother's womb, but you need to be created a second time with your soul, the moment you believe in Jesus Christ. Because verse six says, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit," which means just like your body came into this world through a natural birth, so your soul must go to heaven through a spiritual one. Just like your flesh came into this world through physical causes in biological causes and genetic causes, so your soul must go into eternity through something else. Verse eight also says, "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it...so is everyone who is born in the Spirit," which means just as the wind is outside of your control, because you can't hold it in your hands, so it's the same way with this, because this is completely in the hands of God. Salvation is entirely a work of the Lord. You don't contribute to it, you don't add to it, you don't improve it in any way. It's all of him.

It also changes you forever. When you receive this, you're never the same. When you were born, you are never the same afterwards, right? It's the same idea here. And here's what this has to do with Bill C4 for our discussion today. With the passing of this new law, the government says you can't say that to homosexuals anymore. In certain settings, again, we don't know what these settings are. It's not really clear. But they are saying that that's off the table when it comes to them because you're picking on them. You're discriminating. Which is not true because Jesus said this to Nicodemus, who was not homosexual. The Lord said this to a man who was anything but gay, he was about as straight laced as they come, which means if He said it to him, He'll say it to anybody. Jesus said it to a guy like this. And this message pertains to the whole world, no matter whether you're gay, straight, or whatever. But that's the sort of thing that we're hearing today.

They're also telling us that you don't need to say this to homosexuals because they're fine. They don't need your help. They're happy. They're okay, so just leave them alone. But that's not true either. According to some of the latest statistics I could find, about a third of all gay youth are suicidal, which is more than it was last year. The NBC website put out a study on that they said the number is on the rise. According to another one done in the United Kingdom, homosexuals are twice as likely to be depressed and anxious and hooked on drugs. They're much more likely to be miserable despite the fact that we've accepted them as a society and embraced them. If you follow the news, you'll know that one thing the LGBTQ community keeps saying is that if you just accept us, we'll be fine. If you embrace us, we'll be okay. But we've done that. Canada has been overwhelmingly supportive of this group of people. If you think about it, we celebrate Gay Pride month here in Canada. And we have a gay pride parade that our prime minister marches in. Far as I know, he doesn't march in the Canada Day Parade. But he marches in that one every year. It's just so popular. You get so much attention. When you drive around town, you see people putting rainbow flags outside their business and plastering them across the crosswalks. I think the Chilliwack progress did an article saying that Chilliwack has more rainbow crosswalks in any other place in Canada. We set a national record for that. The schools have embraced the SOGI curriculum which teaches that it's okay to be identified as gay or bisexual. Nothing wrong with that. You see unisex bathrooms at every park. Businesses provide inclusivity seminars where they tell you to treat homosexuals like a minority group, because Canada loves gay people. They are overwhelmingly supportive of them as a nation, and yet they're still miserable. They're still not happy. Because it takes more than that to find happiness, you must be born again. And this doesn't just apply to gay people. This doctrine of conversion applies to every single person on the planet.

If you think about it, Jesus came to make the drunk sober and the drug addict clean and the robber stop robbing people. That was His mission. That's what brought Him to the earth. He came to make the gossips stop gossiping and the swearer stop swearing and the liar start telling the truth. He came to make the coveter stop coveting, the murderer stop murdering, the hater stop hating, and the adulterous man go back home to his wife. And He came to make the homosexuals stop sleeping around. But it all goes back to this: it stems from the doctrine of conversion; it begins with the nature of God because the question is not what does the government think about this? The question is, What does God think about it? Does God think He can change homosexuals? And the answer is yes! Absolutely. So we have to be telling them that today, whether this bill allows it or not. You know, when you serve a church history, one thing you notice is that this is not the first time people have argued about the doctrine of conversion. It's happened before. Back in the 1800s, Charles Spurgeon said this about it in one of his sermons: "Conversion of is of absolute importance for us as Christians. It's the hinge of our Gospel, the foundation of our hope and the greatest miracle of our faith. It lies at the very basis of our salvation. God throws his whole self into the work of conversion, because his little finger can lift the stars and put them in place. But it took more than that to convert us. Both his hands had to bear the nails, both his feet must be fastened

to the cross, and the heart of the Son of God must be pierced with a lance. But Jesus did it because he loved us. He went through all that effort because he cares.”

Friends, this is not a hateful doctrine. This is the most loving one of all because it cost God everything. In fact, this is something that church has also taught for years ever since the beginning. If you remember, in Acts chapter eight, when Philip met an Ethiopian eunuch on the road to Jerusalem, he met the first century equivalent of a transgender person. He met someone who probably could have been part of the LGBTQ community. And you know what he did? He told him about Christ. Why? Because he wanted him to be converted. He wanted him to be born again. Then later on, Paul goes to the city of Ephesus, which was a city that was full of homosexuals. One ancient historian said there was one on every corner, and he did the same thing. He preached Christ to them. Why? For the same reason. He wanted God to save him. Then Paul went to Macedonia, and he did it again. He went to Greece, and he did it again. He went to Malaysia, Thessalonica, Corinth, Philippi, Rome and did the same thing over and over again. All those places were full of gay people, because this is nothing new. What we're saying today is a very, very, very old thing. It didn't originate with us, it goes all the way back to the Bible because God has always had a heart for homosexuals. He wants to save them. And that's what we're going to talk about this morning by looking at four lessons. This passage teaches us about the doctrine of conversion. So that's our sermon for today.

If you're taking notes, in John three, we're going to look at four lessons this passage teaches us about the doctrine of conversion. Since we're talking about a conversion bill, I thought it would be very appropriate to clarify what we mean by that. So it's not misunderstood today because that word can be taken a lot of different ways. In fact, when I was studying for this sermon, I asked one of the doctors in our congregation what people in the medical community mean when they use the term conversion therapy. And I was shocked. I had no idea. Because he showed me an article that talked about the practice of lobotomies and using drugs on people. This article described the practice of reconditioning them through chemicals and shock treatments, where you hook them up to wires and try to torture the behavior out of them like an animal, you treat them like a dog. And I want to be very clear, when we use that word, that is not what we're referring to. It's the farthest thing from our minds. I mean, I've been doing biblical counseling for 10 years now. And I can say, I have never met one Christian who has ever prescribed anything like that to somebody. If they're there, I don't know them. But I want to be equally clear about the fact that we do believe someone can change from this way of life. But the thing that changes them, is God. They don't need drugs, they don't need shock treatments. They don't need lobotomies and all these terrible things. They can do it with the power of Christ Himself. And that's what we're going to look at today by talking about four lessons.

This passage teaches us about the doctrine of conversion, and the first one is that it's necessary. The first lesson this passage teaches us about the doctrine of conversion is that conversion is necessary, which means this is a doctrine that can't be ignored as a church. Even if it's commanded by law, even if that's where this bill is going, we can't get on board with that. It's too important. And if you look in verse one, again, it says, “Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, and this man came to Jesus by night, and said to Him, ‘Rabbi, we know that you have come from God as a teacher, for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.’ Jesus answered and said to him, “Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot, [will not] see the kingdom of God.” If you notice, this chapter begins with the word “now”, which means after all John has written about so far in the Gospel. And if you look right above this in verse 23, it says, “Now,

when he was in Jerusalem, at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, observing His signs, which he was doing. But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them."

That's a little hard to read there. But what it means is that during His ministry, there are many people who believed in Jesus because of His miracles. They trusted in Him because of all His signs, like walking on water and turning water into wine and feeding the 5000. But it says Jesus did not entrust himself to them, because that's not enough. Merely trusting in Him for His miracles is not what it takes to be saved. He wants more than that. But on the flip side, Chapter Three starts off and says, "Now there was a man of the Pharisees" to show you that where everyone else came for the wrong reasons, this guy was different. Where everybody else just came to see Jesus do His show, this guy came for more. And to show you that, He says in first two, it says that Nicodemus told Jesus that they knew that Jesus had come from God as a teacher. And the term Rabbi, is not one we often hear today. But it meant teacher or professor because it referred to someone who can show you the deep things of God. Nicodemus uses that here to say that this is what he thought of Jesus, where everyone else was coming for the show and the miracles and pageantry, this guy wanted to know about God. He had some serious questions.

And knowing that, Jesus picks up on it, and He tells him in verse three, "Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born again, He cannot see the kingdom of God. And that's interesting, because if you notice, Nicodemus doesn't say anything about the Kingdom of God, never even brings it up. But the way it's written here, Jesus knows what's in his mind. So it's like He cuts him off mid-sentence, and He just jumps right on in there. And He says, "Let's cut to the chase Nicodemus, if you really want to see the kingdom, if you really want to be part of it, this is what you must do. There needs to be a new birth in your soul."

I've already said a few words about the term born again, but it means born again or born from above. Jesus says if you want to see heaven, this is what has to happen: you must be born from heaven. If you want to know God, this is what you must do. Your soul needs to come from the same place as God is. Because you're too covered in sin, your heart is too evil without it. And so that's what needs to happen. This is not about you meeting God halfway, Nicodemus. This is not about you doing your part while God does the rest. This is about God doing everything; it starts and stops with Him, which would have shocked a guy like Nicodemus by the way, because to him the way to get to heaven was through your first birth, not your second. To a Jew, the way to be saved was by being Jewish and keeping the law and following the commandments and doing all the things the Pharisees did. Remember, Nicodemus was very faithful to that.

Now Jesus takes this Pharisee at night, he says, "No, that's not enough. God has to do work inside your heart." And I want you to notice, the verse ends there. That's all Jesus says to him initially. And Nicodemus is going to ask questions and the conversation is going to continue. But that's the only thing he says in the beginning, because that's all it takes to be saved. He didn't give Nicodemus a long list of requirements to get into heaven. He doesn't give him a lot of steps and rules and commandments to follow. He tells him one thing, and one thing only, you must be born again, because that's enough. An elderly woman once came to George Whitfield, the famous evangelist and she said, Pastor Whitfield, "Why do you keep saying you must be born again?" He said, "Because, dear woman, you must be born again."

And here's how this relates to the subject today in the discussion of Bill C4: All of this is for homosexuals. As I said before, they can have this new birth right alongside everybody else, because the passage doesn't say unless

one is straight, he cannot see the kingdom of God. And it doesn't say unless one is conservative and heterosexual and cisgender. And he holds to the sex assigned to him his birth. He can have it now, obviously, when you repent, those things happen in your life. But the first thing is that you must be born again. That's all it matters to God. That's how you get into heaven. You need to trust in Christ and let him do a miracle inside your soul. You need to believe in Him and let Him revolutionize your life from the inside out.

It doesn't start outside; it goes inside out. Which is important because there's a big discussion in the LGBTQ community right now, which says that you can't have this. Since the urge towards same sex attractions are natural and biological and physical, you can't be converted because they can't be stopped. In fact, they say that to try and stop them is the unnatural thing to do because it traumatizes people. The problem with that argument is that if homosexuality is natural, then why are people trying to change their genders over that? If it's a biological thing, then why are people having surgery in order to change the sex they already have? See, it's not purely physical because it's a sin. It's against the way God created them to be. But the good news is that God has an answer for that. And that is that He can change it through His power. He can stop what you're doing through His strength, if you ask Him to. He doesn't do it through your strength, because your strength is not enough. He doesn't do it through your power because your power is too weak. The government is right in saying that these people can't change. Well, they can't without the power of God. They've actually got that part right. But we can offer them this power.

This is also important because there's another argument, which says that these urges may not be natural, but they are learned. They're acquired from your environment because you pick it up from those around you like your parents and your school and your community. You get it from the culture and the television and the internet because we're all being bombarded with that right now. Homosexuality is very prevalent in our world. But let me tell you something, that's okay as well. Because even if it is prevalent, God has an answer for that too. And that is that he can change your soul. He can because He can reach past all this stuff in the culture. He can supersede all that stuff on the internet. Because remember, this new birth is from heaven. It's not from the earth. Salvation is something that comes from above us. It doesn't come from below, so there's nothing below that can stop it. There's nothing down here on the earth that can handle it in any way. And that's what we need to be telling people. Listen, friends, there's nothing more miserable than to hear all your life that you can't change the way you're living. And there's nothing worse than being told that. I know this is hard. And I know you're unhappy. And I know you want to commit suicide, because you're so mixed up inside, but there's nothing we can do. Good luck. That's not what we're telling people as a church. We're giving them a message of hope. And the hope is that you can be born again, your life can be transformed.

I don't know why we're being called judgmental. This is not a message of judgment. This is a message of grace and love. You know, I don't know if you've ever heard of the name Rosaria Butterfield before. But she was a former lesbian and college professor at Syracuse University in New York. She stood for gay rights and she was very involved in the LGBTQ community. In fact, she was so passionate about it that she began to read the Bible in order to attack Christians, until she realized that the Bible was offering her something she didn't have. And that was a chance to start over again. That's what we're offering people. We want to give them a chance to live a new life.

And that brings us to another lesson this passage teaches us about the doctrine of conversion. And that is that it's spiritual. So the first lesson is that it's necessary because you can't live without it. Now, before God anyway, you

can't see heaven without this miracle. That's why we're making such a big deal about it. If you take away the doctrine of conversion, you lose everything as a church. In fact, if you take this away, then all you can ever do for gay people is watch them run closer and closer to the cliff. All you can ever do accomplish is to stand by and watch as they go faster, and faster and faster toward hell and eventually fall off. Because you can't stop them. There's no power without this. But through this doctrine, what you can do as a church is you can come to them, and you can pick them up off the ground, and show them the love of God. That's why we keep teaching it.

And that brings us to a second lesson this passage teaches us about the doctrine of conversion, and that is that it's spiritual. Which means it's not just a physical thing. The change that we're describing here is more than just biological because it goes straight to the heart of a person. And if you look in verse four, Nicodemus says, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" Just to stop the reading there, I can tell you that Nicodemus is having trouble understanding what Jesus said. I've heard a lot of people say that Nicodemus was confused, because he was taking Jesus literally. But if you remember, Nicodemus is a smart guy. He's very intelligent. So he must have known there's more to it than that. Because what he wanted to know is how can a man be born again, spiritually when he's old? Most of the rulers of the Sanhedrin were old at this time. You had to be in your 60s or 70s to get in. It was a very advanced age. And so Nicodemus says basically, "How can a man start over when he's like that? I can see how a young man can do this. Because he has the energy and he has the strength, but not me. I'm just too tired Jesus. So what do I do?" And in response to that, Jesus says in verse five, "Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." And that's a controversial verse. Because some say it means you have to be baptized in order to be saved. But that's the opposite of what Jesus is telling us. What He means is that when the Spirit saves you, this is what He does, He washes you off inside. When you're born again, this is what happens. He baptizes your soul, not just your body. And to show you how he does that, verse six says, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." In other words, just like that, which is born of human flesh is human, that which is born inside of you is spiritual, because that's where your soul is. Your soul is a spiritual thing. So that's what God cleanses off with salvation. And to illustrate this, the rest of this passage, if you look in verse eight, talks about the wind because that's what the Spirit is like. You can't see Him and don't know where He comes from and where He's going. You don't know who is going to be saved or who He's going to convict and draw out of this or that lifestyle.

It's also why He mentions a birth earlier in verse three because you don't take any credit for your birth. When you were born, the doctor didn't shake your little baby hand and say way to go, congratulations, you just birthed yourself. No, it's silly. It was all your parents, they did all the work. And in the same way, salvation is all of God. And here's how this relates to our topic for today, homosexuality is a spiritual struggle. Despite what some tell you, it's not purely biological. Now, it does have biological factors involved. And there are physical forces at play. Absolutely. But it's not entirely made up of those things, which is why biological resources aren't helping it. That's why all the drugs and chemicals and sex changes in the world are not making it better for these people. Because that's not where the answer is found. It's found in your relationship to God. I mean, if you notice, in this passage, Jesus doesn't say, Nicodemus, here's what you have to do to go to heaven, you need to go see a doctor and get some shock treatment. You need to go down to the psych ward and get some wires hooked up to your brain and let them zap the sin away. And He doesn't tell him you need to take some drugs, go down to your local pharmacist and get a prescription for 20 micrograms of Zoloft, that'll do the trick. He says you need to cry out to God. That's what will save you. You need to beg Him for mercy because it's entirely up to Him. Friends don't buy the lie that modern science has done away with the need for all of this because it hasn't. All modern science has

managed to do is drug up people while they sin. It's done some other things too, obviously. But in this area, that's what it's done. All we've learned to do is get people stoned while they lust after each other. But we haven't figured out a way to stop the lust, because that goes back to God.

In fact, it's a tragic thing, but if you ask a lot of scientists today, they'll be very frank with you and tell you they don't believe in a soul anymore. They don't believe in the unseen part of man, which is why they treat gay people the way they do. That's why they keep drugging and cutting and hurting them. That's why they keep poking and prodding and stabbing them with their surgical knives in order to change their gender, because that's all they know how to do. It's like putting a bandaid on cancer. They can go deeper than that. But the fact is, the church can. The reality is that you can go so much deeper because you have the Holy Spirit of God. And he can fix things that modern science can never fix. In fact, this was Nicodemus' problem here because in verse four, when he says, "How can a man be born when he's old?" He means, how can he be saved with a body like mine? How can he go to heaven with all these physical limitations? Look, me, Jesus, I have white hair, my teeth are falling out, my skin is wrinkled, I'm weary. And so Jesus answers this by telling this man, listen Nicodemus, this has nothing to do with your body. This has to do with your soul. This doesn't have to do with the outside of you and your physical limitations. It has to do with your spiritual limitations. And God can take care of that through the cross. And even more than that, he can do it for every man because everybody has a soul. I don't care who you are, we all have a heart, which means that God can save anybody gay, straight, or whoever. Transgender, cisgender or whatever your background is in this, we can all be transformed, because a new birth is a spiritual thing. We've gotten this so backwards today. And we need to remember it.

In the recent weeks I have had an opportunity to read a book by a man named Paul Johnson called The Intellectuals. He was a survey the lives of some of the most famous thinkers from the past several centuries, like Karl Marx and Jean Paul Sarte and Bertrand Russell. And it was fascinating because the book said that in the last few centuries, there's been a shift in our society, from the church to the authority of the intellectual, or the man who denies the existence of God. But He says he has all the answers because he's just really smart. You laugh, that's actually what's the idea. And so Paul Johnson asked the question, he said, "Well, what are their lives? If they make such a pronouncement that they know all the answers? How did they live and he said terribly. Their lives were a total disaster because they were drunks and alcoholics and drug addicts. They were violent and adulterous, and they gave their children away to orphanages rather than raising themselves because they viewed life as a physical thing. It's just biological. We're all just molecules. We're all dust in the wind. So it doesn't matter how we live because there's no one we're accountable to. And friends, we're here to say that that's what happens when you view life like that. It's a total train wreck. And we're here to offer the world something more.

Which brings us to one final lesson this passage teaches us on the doctrine of conversion, just to review these other ones. The first one is that it's necessary. And secondly, it's spiritual. It's not genetic. There's so much talk about genetics today, because people tell you that if you're born gay, you'll stay gay. And there's nothing you can do about it. But that's not true, because the church is full of homosexuals today who were converted by the power of God. In fact, I've met several of them, they've told me the most amazing thing is that they grew up hearing that this couldn't happen. But it did because of Christ. He could change anyone. I encourage you, if you've never done it before, go home and read the Gospel of John and look at the lives he changed in this one precious gospel, just change after change in their conversion after conversion. And it leads us to one more lesson this passage teaches us about this precious doctrine, and that is that it is attainable, and it's not out of reach. A third and fourth lesson this passage teaches us on the doctrine of conversion is that it's attainable and it's not out of reach, which means

you can have this if you've listened to all I've said this morning, and you say that's way out there. I can't get that. Well, you can. That's what it says. And if you would read in verse nine, continuing our conversation here with Nicodemus, these are his final words. Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" Now I have to tell you, those are not very encouraging final words in the discussion. Because it shows you that Nicodemus still doesn't get it. He doesn't really understand what Jesus is saying here. So to give them an illustration that he would be familiar with, Jesus tells them a story from the Old Testament, if you look down in verse 14, this is the story. He says, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life." That passage is a reference to numbers 21, which tells us that when they were in the wilderness, Israel sinned against the Lord by complaining against Him. God had done all these wonderful things for Israel: He was letting them follow Him by a pillar of cloud by day and a fire by night, bringing Manna down in the morning for them to eat, taking care of them, and they were griping about it. So to punish them, He sent poisonous snakes to get them to stop which worked, but it started to kill them. So he had Moses construct a pole, with the figure on a snake on it so that whoever looks to it can be saved. That pole with the figure of a snake is still used by nurses and doctors today. You can see it as a pin. It's a sign of healing. It's been that way for 1000s of years. But the reason he mentions it to Nicodemus here is to show him that this is the way God has always worked in history, he saves you through faith alone. He was that way in the Old Testament, that way in the new, you see it with Israel, you see it with the church because the Jews didn't have to do a bunch of things in order to be saved. They didn't have to walk to the pole and talk to the pole and run to it. They just had to look. That was it. They had to put their eyes on it. And that was all and God saved them. You know, one country preacher said it this way. He said, "It doesn't take a lot of brains to look at something. Lookin' ain't liftin' and it ain't workin' and it ain't pickin' something up off the ground. You can be a baby and look at something. You can be a complete idiot and do it." And it's the same way of being saved. All you have to do is look. Because at the cross, the Bible says Jesus paid the price for our sins. He took all our punishment in our place. He didn't pay half while we paid the rest. He didn't pay 60% while we paid 40%. He paid it all so that whoever looks to Him can be forgiven and born again. That's the way it works. If you notice in the verse here in verse 15, he says, "Even so must the Son of Man be lifted up so that whoever believes in Him will have eternal life." And the significance to that passage is that it's the first one of Three references Jesus makes to believing in him in this chapter to remind you that this is how you're forgiven. Now this is how you go to heaven, you believe. You believe and have faith. If you look in verse 16, it says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." Jesus says basically that this is how you get everlasting life, Nicodemus, this is how you're rescued from perishing and going to hell, you believe.

He says further down in verse 17, "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in me is not judged. Jesus says, Nicodemus, if you believe in me, this is what God will do for you as well. You won't be judged. But the point is that it all goes back to this. And here's how this relates to the bill. If you want to know why are we making a big deal about this today and setting time aside in sermon and making the whole Sunday for it? The reason is that this is how gay people can be saved as well. They're saved by looking to Jesus. They're not saved one way while you're saved another. Don't ever think that. And they don't go to heaven through one set of circumstances and you go through another set of circumstances, we all go through the cross. They don't have to clean up their life first in order to get it. They don't have to get themselves together and change and be straight for 90 days. It doesn't work that way. They look, they're saved. They believe, they're forgiven.

Again, while it's not clear what this new bill is saying, it's obvious the government doesn't want people telling them that in certain settings, because it's not very loving. That's the accusation. It's not very kind. But friends, it's the most kind thing you could ever tell them. God is offering them a fresh start. He's given them a new beginning. And all you have to do is look to Christ in order to get it. You know, if you had the cure for cancer, wouldn't you tell everybody? If you knew how to solve aids, or some terrible disease, wouldn't you preach it from the rooftops? Friends, you have a cure for something so much greater than cancer, you have a cure for sin. So you have no choice but to say it. In fact, in the preparation for this sermon, our elder board prepared a response to Bill C4 which is in your bulletins if you want to take your bulletins out. We wanted to put something together that clarifies our position on it because it was a very disturbing law for us. When we first read about it, we understood that there are ramification for this. And so we want to make it clear what we mean so there's no misunderstanding when we use the word conversion. And here's our statement. Let me read it to you in full:

On December 7, 2021 the Canadian Federal Senate unanimously approved a law that was recently passed in the House of Commons to criminalize a process that is known as "conversion therapy." According to the Law, conversion therapy is defined as any "practice, treatment, or service designed to

- *Change a person's sexual orientation to heterosexual;*
- *Change a person's gender identity to cisgender;*
- *Change a person's gender expression so that it conforms to the sex assigned to the person at birth;*
- *Repress or reduce non-heterosexual attraction or sexual behaviour;*
- *Repress a person's non-cisgender gender identity; or*
- *Repress or reduce a person's gender expression that does not conform to the sex assigned to the person at birth"*

As Elders of a local church in Canada, we feel that it is our duty to respond to this law. Our response is not to be interpreted as an expression of hostility towards the government or the LGBTQ+ community. Rather, we desire to clarify what we mean when we use terms like "conversion" or "salvation" as these are part of our common vernacular. We believe firmly in the practice of evangelism because it is our goal to "go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation" (Mark 16:15). A big part of that is sharing with people the indisputable truth that their life can change by the power of God (John 3:3; 1 Corinthians 1:30) and we have no intention of altering that message in light of this new Bill.

In an attempt to clarify what the issues are, we make the following statement:

### **Affirmations**

We affirm the truth and authority of God's Word in all matters of life including that of gender and sexuality (Isaiah 40:8; Matthew 5:17-19; Luke 16:17; 2 Timothy 3:16).

We affirm that human sexuality is defined by God alone and it is heterosexual (Genesis 1:27, 1:24, 2:18).

We affirm that homosexuality, transgenderism, or any deviation from God's design for sex is a sin (Deuteronomy 22:5, 23:1; Leviticus 18:22; 1 Timothy 1:9-10; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

We affirm that sin, if left unrepented of, will be punished forever in Hell (Romans 1:18-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Colossians 3:5-6).

We affirm that Jesus came to this earth, died on a cross, and rose from the grave so that anyone who sins can be saved from that punishment and go to Heaven. This includes all of us for “all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23). It therefore includes homosexuals, transgender people, or anyone struggling with their sexual identity (John 3:16; Romans 5:8-9; Romans 6:23; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

We affirm that, once someone believes in Jesus, their life is converted or radically changed forever. In the words of 2 Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.” In fact, their life becomes so different that Jesus referred to it as being “born again” (John 3:3).

We affirm that this change results in a renewed outlook on sex and a return to God’s original design for it. We affirm further that there are many former practicing homosexuals who have been saved and subsequently repented of that sin and lifestyle. They can testify to the fact that, while they may still struggle with same sex attraction, they now have the power to overcome it out of love for Christ. Romans 6:6 says, “Our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin.”

We affirm that the church has historically taught these doctrines for centuries ever since Canada first became a nation.

We also affirm that, to our knowledge, the government has never before outlawed these doctrines or chosen to take such an aggressive stand against them.

We affirm that, while it is part of our duty as Christians to submit to the governing authorities (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17), our greatest responsibility is to submit the Word of God.

We affirm that God is going to hold people in government accountable who disregard His Word on this issue (Psalm 75:7; Isaiah 33:22; Acts 17:31; Revelation 20:11-15). They will be held responsible for all the confusion and emotional distress that they are creating in our society.

## **Denials**

We deny that the government has either the right, or the jurisdiction to reinterpret or change what the Bible says about sexuality (Matthew 5:18-19).

We deny that the government has the right to keep the church from openly teaching what God has revealed in His Word on this matter. When it does so, the church has no alternative but to break the law because “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

We deny that homosexuality, transgenderism, or anything that deviates from heterosexuality is acceptable to God (Deuteronomy 22:5, 23:1; Leviticus 18:22; 1 Timothy 1:9-10; 1 Corinthians 6:9).

We deny that a person can change the gender that was assigned to them at birth. Any attempt to do so is unnatural and against the law of creation (Genesis 1:27).

However, we also deny that a Christian has the right to say any of this with a spirit of hatred. Instead, we want to “do all things in love” (1 Corinthians 16:14) and “let our speech always be seasoned with grace” (Colossians 4:6). This includes what we say to those who disagree with us in the LGBTQ+ community.

We deny that conversion therapy practices such as shock treatment, reconditioning, lobotomies, or the use of drugs should ever be used to help those who are struggling with their sexual choices. All such practices are harmful and should be avoided at all costs. We want to be clear that, when we use the term “conversion,” this is not what we are referring to. We are referring to the power of God alone to change a person’s life through faith in Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit.

We also deny any findings which say that it is unethical to try to change a person’s sexual desires. Ethics is the branch of knowledge that deals with human morality and the only one who has the right to determine what is moral is God alone.

We deny that Bill C4 is good for the nation of Canada. Instead, we believe that it will restrict free speech among its citizens and open the door to the persecution of Christians if it is not amended.

We deny that this bill is helpful to those in the LGBTQ+ community. Indeed, we affirm that it is potentially very harmful. Since gender dysphoria is often the source of emotional distress among transgender people, it seems obvious that the best way to help them is to address their feelings rather than encouraging irreversible surgery. This is especially true if they believe gender identity is fluid and can shift back and forth. Open, humble, and gracious dialogue on this topic must be available to those of this persuasion. It is neither responsible nor kind to leave a suffering individual to suffer further emotional distress without honest, supportive counselling available which explores the ramifications of both sides of an issue.

## CONCLUSION

In closing, we want to quote the words of the Apostle Paul in First Corinthians 6:9-11:

*Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.*

Paul reminds us here that every sinner needs spiritual conversion. We all need to be washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In order to show us this, Paul relates this to several non-sexual sins like idolatry, covetousness, and drunkenness then he relates it to several sexual ones like fornication, adultery, effeminacy, and homosexuality. He does that in order to remind us that God can save us from both. He can deliver us from every form of evil because our Lord has triumphed over all of it through the cross.

This is a truth that must be upheld by the church today and we write this document in the confidence and hope that it will.

Sincerely,

## The Elders of Grace Fellowship Church Chilliwack

I wanted to read all that to you because as an elder board, we want you to know where we stand on this issue. You need to know where we're at. Because if this bill means that you cannot confront homosexuality in the church anymore, by law, then we're not going to abide by it. If it means that you can't tell them that there's hope that they can change, we will defy the law. This is our line in the sand. And we're not saying that out of frustration or hatred toward the government. We're not doing it out of some spirit of fear. We're not afraid. We're doing it because homosexuals need the gospel. They need to know that God can save them. And you need to know as a church that we're not going to stop saying that. We also put this document together to remind you that as a Christian, you're not alone in this. Our whole church stands behind you in giving them the hope of the gospel. I know you guys don't always feel that way. I know there's times you feel like you're alone in these things, but you're not. There are Christians all over the world that feel the same way. In fact, I told you before that John MacArthur recently sent out a letter asking pastors here in Canada to stand with him while he addresses this issue in California. I was on a zoom call with him several weeks ago, in which he asked 150 pastors from all over North America to join with him on this and many of them said that they would. But they're doing it so you don't feel alone. This law hasn't gotten into United States yet. It is trickling into some of the states. But they're doing this ahead of time because they love you. And they want to support you. And you need to be encouraged because it means you're not forgotten. Other people are on your side, and most importantly, God is. Amen? And that's all you need to know.

In my studies this week, I came across a story the time the preacher John Chrysostom, was about to be banished from his church in the fourth century for speaking out against some of the evils of his day, just like we're doing right now. He preached a sermon to his people right before he was thrown out of the town in which he said this, "What do I fear? I don't fear death, because I know Christ is my life. And I don't fear exile because the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. I'll fit in there just like I fit in here. And he said that I don't fear poverty because I brought nothing into the world. And I'll carry nothing out. No, beloved, a Christian has nothing to fear." And friends, I tell you that story because you need to be saying the same thing today. You have nothing to fear of God is on your side. Will you remember that this morning and take heart? Let me pray that you would.

Let's go to the Lord in a word of prayer. Heavenly Father, it's not an easy thing to stand with courage and at the same time to stand with grace. So many times we seem to go one way or the other. We stand bold and firm and we sound like we hate everybody or we stand graciously and loving and we sound like we're cowards. But Father, your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ fully embodied both. He told people when they were in sin, He told them when they were wrong, He told them like you did with Nicodemus, you have to be born again. But at the same time, He was so gracious with it. Later on Nicodemus was born again. That's what we want to do today we want to tell people that same message. Would you give us grace with this as a church? Would you give us grace with the other churches in Canada? There's so many of them that are bold in these things and they will stand. There's some that will cower and back down and fold. But there's many that won't. But God, we always want to have a heart for the lost sinner. Give us grace in that and as we come to the Lord's table. This is a time to remember, Father, that we were all lost in sin. And it's this cross and this Saviour and this Jesus who saved us, all of us. May we look into Him. Thank you for Christ. May He be glorified as we celebrate this day, in Jesus name. Amen.